

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Louise Molteni and I am a resident of Tolland, CT. I work as an ABA paraeducator in the Tolland Public School District, I am currently working at Tolland Middle School. Please accept my following testimony in support of House Bill 6881:

Paraeducators are on the front lines of student learning. We provide one-on-one assistance to special education students, reinforce instruction, manage classrooms, and support English language learners. In addition to the students we support we are also supporting the teachers, Physical, Speech, and Occupational Therapists, as well as the BCBA. We are a huge part in data collection for all these supports and we are implementing a lot of their goals that they are responsible for as stated in the students IEP. Despite the important roles we play, paraeducators are among the lowest paid staff in our schools. We can't afford our healthcare and there is little chance that we can afford to retire with dignity-unless we work a second job. We don't get paid over the summer and we can't collect unemployment. There is no wonder paraeducators are leaving the profession, there are 1,300 paraeducator positions vacant in many of our districts in our state.

House Bill 6881 is an important step in improving the work-life and career opportunities of Connecticut's paraeducators. But Most of all: this bill is an opportunity to begin to treat paraeducators with the respect and dignity we have earned.

Speaking personally, I love my job. I can't think of anything I would rather do. I graduated college with a degree in Human Services, and my first job out of college was a recreation counselor working with children with different abilities. I never looked back. I was meant to work with this population.

About 12 years ago, I began working as a paraeducator in the Tolland Public school system. I have always been a one-on-one paraeducator working with pretty involved students. I love being one-on-one. I love knowing the students strengths and weaknesses, when to push, when to back off. I love celebrating the students' accomplishments with them.

After working in TPS for 12 years my salary is \$17.36 an hour.

My duties currently include supporting a student in our ABA program. I am his one-on-one. I attend and support him in his mainstream classes. I take notes for him, modify his work, and make study guides for him. If he is having a difficult day, I use deescalation strategies to help get him back on

track. I am also following a behavior plan written by our BCBA and taking hourly data on his behaviors.

Along with my low salary, I am responsible for my family's health care. Currently, I pay 17.5% of my salary, and the district gives me just about 50% towards my deductible.

I am so proud to be a paraeducator. I enjoy working with the more involved students and seeing all their hard work and progress. I love being their cheerleader! I like to think that all the students I have worked with all these years have become a little more independent, developed a lot more independent skills, liked school a little more, have learned the coping strategies we work on together, and enjoy coming to school because of my support.

Now is the time for this committee and all the members of the General Assembly to take immediate and meaningful action to have paraeducators make a liveable wage, lower our healthcare costs, ensure we have meaningful retirement benefits, and give us the tools we need to help students succeed. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today. Please support learning by prioritizing paraeducators and passing House Bill 6881.

Louise Molteni
Tolland, CT